

RICE CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT *Dialogue*

Grass Clippings 101: Leave on Lawn or Compost – Keep out of Water Bodies and off the Street!

With all of this rain, our lawns need to be cut every time we turn around. When mowing, please make sure you sweep up the grass clippings that get on the street. Otherwise these clippings will be washed into the storm sewers and deposited into our lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands adding excess stored nutrients to our waters causing algal blooms which, in turn, decreases oxygen available to aquatic life.

Please bring grass clippings to your county compost site. Do NOT throw leaves and grass clippings into lakes, streams, wetlands, ponds or storm water ponds. Besides causing water pollution, added leaves and grass clippings decrease water storage capacity. Storm water ponds will fill up more quickly and need to be dug out more frequently at the expense of taxpayer dollars.

Grass clippings are a valuable source of nutrients for your lawn. If clippings are left on the lawn, University of Minnesota soil test recommendations call for less nitrogen fertilizer. Also, the addition of organic matter in the form of clippings may help to improve the status of your soil if it is sandy or low in organic matter.

Leaving clippings on the lawn does not normally contribute to increased thatch formation. Thatch is a layer of un-decomposed organic matter that builds up between the soil surface and the actively growing green vegetation. The major factors contributing to thatch development are:

- excessive nitrogen fertilization
- infrequent mowing
- low soil oxygen levels
- soil compaction
- over mulching

While leaving clippings on the lawn is recommended, certain instances make the practice inadvisable. Following are some exceptions to the rule:

- If the lawn is heavily infested with certain leaf diseases, removing clippings may help reduce disease severity.
- If the lawn must be mowed when wet, or if the grass has become too tall, clippings can mat together and smother the grass
- If your mower is unsafe to operate without a bagging attachment, the bag should be left in place.

For more information about lawn care, visit the U of M Extension Service website at www.extension.umn.edu/info-u or contact Dawn Dubats, RCWD Environmental Education Coordinator.